

# MUSEUM THEATRE GUIDE

## RED, WHITE, AND BLACK

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### OVERVIEW

Period Pieces bring exhibit themes to life through dramatic performances that incorporate historical and universal themes. This presentation features two actors who perform in the living room setting in the temporary exhibit *Front Page Fifties*. The fifteen-minute piece is based on letters, newspaper articles, and court records relating to an incident that occurred in Louisville in 1954. A museum staff member is on hand to introduce the play and conduct a discussion after it ends.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

#### *Topics*

- Race Relations
- Civil Rights Movement
- Cold War

#### *Core Content Connections*

- Historical Perspective: After World War II, America experienced economic growth (e.g., suburban growth), struggles for racial and gender equality (e.g., Civil Rights Movement), the extension of civil liberties, and conflict over political issues (e.g., McCarthyism and U.S. involvement in Vietnam) (SS-H-5.2.6); primary sources allow individuals to experience history from the perspectives of people who lived it (SS-H-5.1.2).
- Culture and Society: As cultures emerge and develop, conflict and competition may occur (SS-H-2.4.1).

### BACKGROUND

#### *History*

In May 1954, Anne and Carl Braden bought a house in an all-white suburb of Louisville on behalf of an African American couple, Andrew and Charlotte Wade, unable to buy it themselves due to Jim Crow housing practices. A burning cross and numerous threats greeted the new residents, and just past midnight on June 27, 1954, an explosion turned a dream house to dust.

After the bombing, Commonwealth's Attorney A. Scott Hamilton seized on the theory that the incident was an "inside job," designed by the Bradens to prepare the way for a Communist takeover. Nationally, the recent Army-McCarthy hearings had undercut the credibility of unbridled anti-Communism. Yet, in Louisville the Bradens

and five acquaintances were indicted for "criminal syndicalism" against the governments of the United States and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Carl Braden was the only "conspirator" brought to trial. No evidence was presented to connect him with the bombing, but the prosecution's allegations of Communist affiliation, though denied under oath and never proven, made objectivity difficult. Braden was convicted under a 1919 Kentucky sedition statute, serving seven months of a 15-year sentence. In November 1956, all charges against him and the other defendants were dismissed in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling invalidating state sedition laws. Andrew and Charlotte Wade, however, were never able to move back into their damaged house, and those who committed the violence were never brought to justice.

#### *Plot*

Since the real series of events (from the purchase of the house to the final dismissal of charges) lasted more than two years, the playwright has compressed the chronology to fit within a 15-minute playing time. The male actor establishes the dates and times of events for the audience. The play begins and ends with a fictionalized prologue, which incorporates a traditional spiritual and a poem to establish an appropriate atmosphere for the play.

#### *Characters*

Two actors comprise the cast of this production. The female portrays Anne Braden. Her dialogue is based on an actual letter Braden wrote to her parents. A male actor, referred to as "The Community," plays a variety of characters. In addition to representing Carl Braden, Andrew Wade IV, and Attorney A. Scott Hamilton, the actor also quotes from newspaper accounts and editorials. This actor employs slight changes in posture and voice to establish the different characters.

#### *Setting and costumes*

The actual event occurred in several settings in Louisville, Kentucky, but the play takes place in the living-room setting in the exhibit *Front Page Fifties*, symbolizing how front-page events inevitably affect everyday life. A chair is used to establish the various locations needed to tell the story. Costumes are true to the period of the 1950s. Though no costumes are changed, the actor playing The Community often makes slight adjustments to his clothing to differentiate characters.

### *Performance style*

The script is presentational in form, with actors addressing the audience throughout the production. Monologue and dialogue are combined to present multiple viewpoints about the incident and the debate surrounding it.

### **IN THE MUSEUM**

The time of the performance will be posted outside the exhibit area. Students will be asked to sit on the floor, although limited seating is available for students with special needs and adults. A museum staff member will provide a brief introduction to the play. After the fifteen-minute performance, the actors will come out of character to participate in a follow-up discussion with the audience.

We rely on teachers and chaperones to make sure students behave well during performances, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

### **AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE**

- Show respect for the performers and other museum guests by not talking.
- Do not use recording devices, cameras, or laser-pointers during the performance.
- Do not touch or talk with performers unless instructed or encouraged to do so.

### **BACK IN THE CLASSROOM**

A museum staff member will provide you with a post-visit packet containing several of the primary sources used to create the play, an open-response question, and an evaluation form.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Please help us evaluate the effectiveness of the program by completing and returning the evaluation form in the post-visit packet. You can assess student learning with the open-response question. If you can, send us copies of your students' responses!

Kentucky Historical Society  
An Agency of the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet  
100 West Broadway  
Frankfort, KY 40601  
(502) 564-1792  
[www.kyhistory.org](http://www.kyhistory.org)



# RESOURCES

## CHRONOLOGY

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### 1954

**May 10**—House in Rone Court, near Shively, purchased by Carl and Anne Braden, a white couple, for transfer to Andrew Wade IV, an African American.

**May 14**—Wade and family begin moving into home; angry white rally in front of Bradens' home; participants demand that Rone Court remain segregated.

**May 15-16**—Cross burned in vacant lot adjoining Wade property. Shots fired into Wade house.

**May 17**—County police set up round-the-clock watch. Volunteer guards also watch property.

**May 17**—Announcement of *Brown V. Board of Education* decision by U.S. Supreme Court strikes down segregation in schools.

**June 12**—Day guards discontinued at Wade house by county police.

**June 16**—South End Federal Savings & Loan Association files suit to have \$8,000 mortgage on house declared due and payable.

**June 27**—House damaged by dynamite explosion at 12:30 a.m. Round-the-clock watch resumed.

**June 30**—County officials turn down request for court of inquiry.

**July 6**—Wades and Bradens file answer to foreclosure suit.

**July 22**—Wade and a friend arrested for breach of peace after dispute with County Police over a friend's attempt to re-enter blasted house.

**July 23**—County Police Chief Walter Layman says guard to be kept at Wade house, "regardless of cost."

**August 3**—In Quarterly Court, Wade fined \$100, given 30-day jail sentence on breach of peace charge. Released on bond pending appeal.

**August 27**—Foreclosure hearings begin on June 18<sup>th</sup> suit.

**August 31**—Louisville Fire & Marine Insurance Company files suite to decide recipient of \$5,801 for repairs to house.

**September 15**—Grand jury opens inquiry into explosion. Bradens charge witch hunt, refuse to answer whether they belong to certain organizations on grounds of irrelevancy.

**September 18**—Criminal Court Judge L. R. Curtis upholds Vernon Bown for refusing to answer whether he is a member of the Communist Party.

**September 24**—Literature about communism seized by state in apartment of Bown and I. O. Ford. Bown indicted for contempt and jailed in default of bond.

**September 25**—Bown pleads innocent of contempt.

**September 29**—Lewis Lubka, Miss Larue Spiker, and Miss Louise Gilbert jailed for contempt.

**September 30**—Police raid Lubka's home, do not reveal what was seized.

**October 1**—Grand jury indicts Bown for causing explosion; Bradens, Miss Gilbert, Miss Spiker, Ford, and Bown for teaching or advocating sedition. Police remove several cartons of literature of undisclosed nature from the apartment shared by Miss Gilbert and Miss Spiker.

**October 2**—Seven enter pleas of innocent. Bond set at \$10,000 each.

**November 29**—The trial of Carl Braden begins.

**December 2**—U. S. Senate officially censures Joseph McCarthy.

**December 13**—Carl Braden found guilty and sentenced to 15 years in prison and a \$5,000 fine. Bond set at \$40,000.

### 1955

**July 11**—Carl Braden released from prison on bond.

### 1956

**November**—Charges against Carl Braden and the other defendants are dismissed by the Kentucky Court of Appeals.

### 1957

Andrew Wade places a "For Sale" sign in his yard on Rone Court.

### 1985

Louisville home of Robert and Martha Marshall firebombed apparently in a racially motivated action.